

Kentucky's HANDS

A crying baby. A frantic young mother alone with her fretful baby. Who can she turn to for help? **HANDS** may be the answer for her. Health Access Nurturing Development Services (HANDS) is a new voluntary home health visiting program for Kentucky's first-time parents and their babies.

HANDS is part of Governor Paul Patton's Early Childhood Initiative, KIDS NOW, passed by the 2000 General Assembly. It is being underwritten by the Kentucky tobacco settlement and Medicaid funds.

The program consists of family support by paraprofessional home visitors who take part in a week-long training covering subjects ranging from family strengths to early child development. The visitors maintain contact with the family on a regular basis throughout the first two years of the baby's life. They help the families get regular medical care, needed services, parenting resources, and other support.

As many as 10,000 babies are born in Kentucky every year to first-time parents. Many of these parents will be ready to accept the new responsibilities of their roles. Others, however, may face burdens of everyday life that will affect how they are able to care for their new baby. HANDS offers new families a place to turn for help to become the best parents possible.

The burdens often associated with staying in school, finding employment, caring for the baby, assuring well-child visits in the first years of life, and making sure the child is immunized on time--all are activities for which the new parent may need a helping hand. Any first-time parent or newborn child is eligible for home visitation services. There are no income guidelines and no charge for the service.

Kentucky's health care providers are in a unique position to participate in HANDS by referring families who may need "an extra pair of hands." Call the local health department for more information or to make a referral. In northern Kentucky, call either the health department or one of the "Every Child Succeeds" sites. In Lexington, call the health department or the Family Care Center.

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